

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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July 22, 2004

The Honorable Dr. John H. Marburger, III
Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Dr. Marburger:

I'm writing to urge you to intervene in a decision the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has made to de-orbit the Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission (TRMM) satellite.

As I'm sure you're aware, TRMM is a tremendously successful satellite program. As a research satellite, it has provided unprecedented insights into the nature of precipitation and contributed significantly to our understanding of the hydrological cycle, the effects of storms on the Earth's radiation budget, and global climate. It has also dramatically improved our ability to track hurricanes. Near real-time data from the satellite are routinely being used by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Defense in their tropical cyclone models.

Although the satellite is technically capable of continuing to serve both science and the nation, NASA has said that it is unable to find the funding to continue flying TRMM. According to NASA, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, NASA's partner in developing TRMM, has declined to contribute additional funding, and so has NOAA.

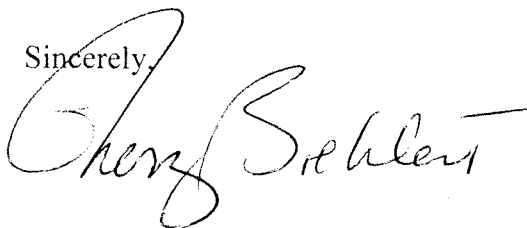
But we urge you to work with NASA, NOAA, the Department of Defense, and any other agency that benefits from the data TRMM provides to find the additional funding to keep the satellite in service. The cost of keeping the satellite functional is minuscule compared to the value it provides.

Further, we believe this case unfortunately is only the most recent example of a longstanding problem regarding the transition of research satellites that NASA builds and launches into working satellites that other agencies, such as NOAA, might operate. More attention must be devoted to how to better coordinate satellite operations between agencies, so as to prevent currently operational and valuable resources like TRMM from being wasted.

I look forward to working with you to ensure the continuance of the TRMM mission and to rectifying the broader problem of identifying and maintaining the valuable capabilities of research satellites in an operational capacity.

With Best Regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sherwood L. Boehlert". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "S" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

SHERWOOD L. BOEHLERT
Chairman

Sean O'Keefe, Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration
DM (Ret.) Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration